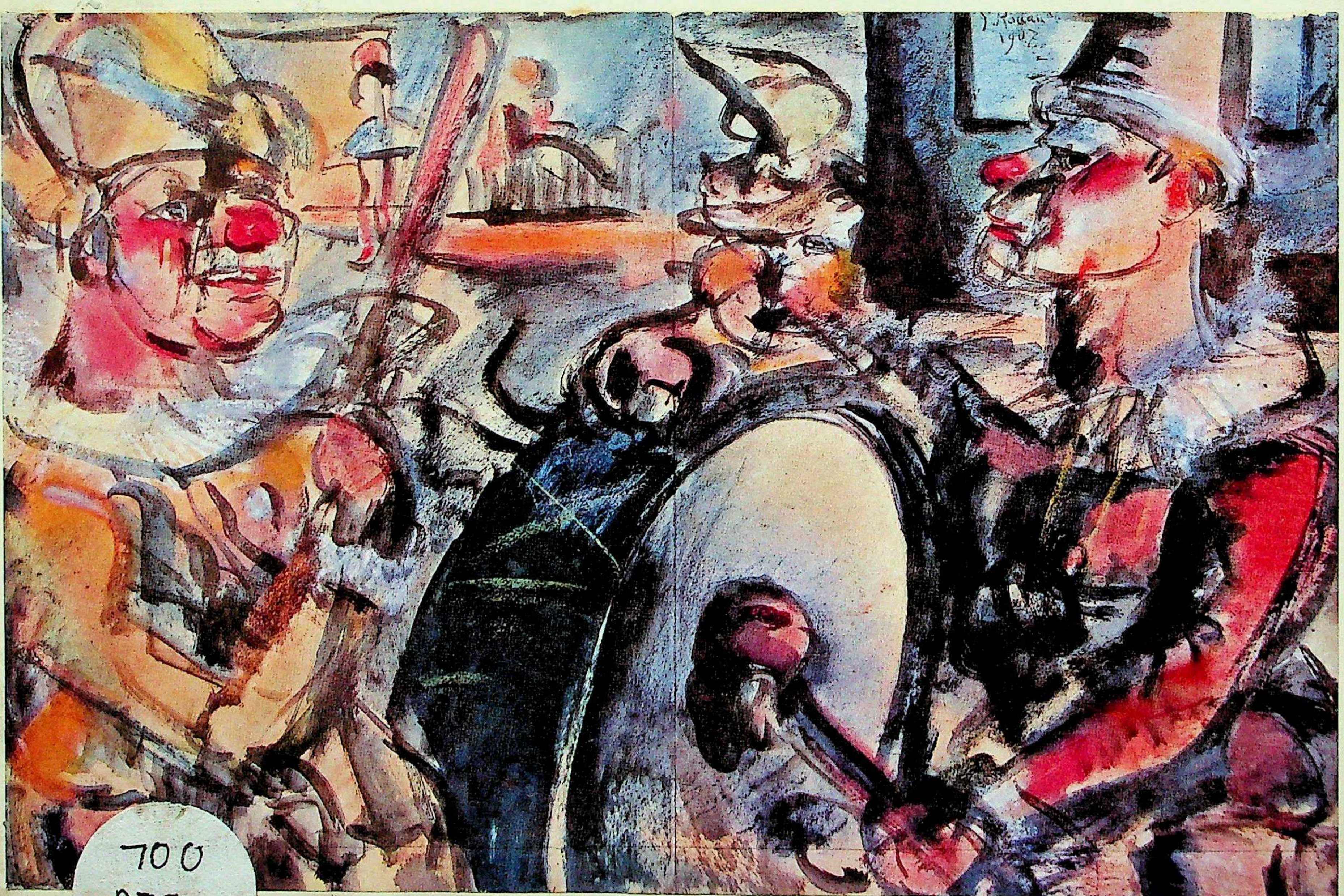
# Rouault



700
R75
1047

AN
Express
ART
BOOK

16 BEAUTIFUL FULL COLOUR PRINTS

# ROUAULT

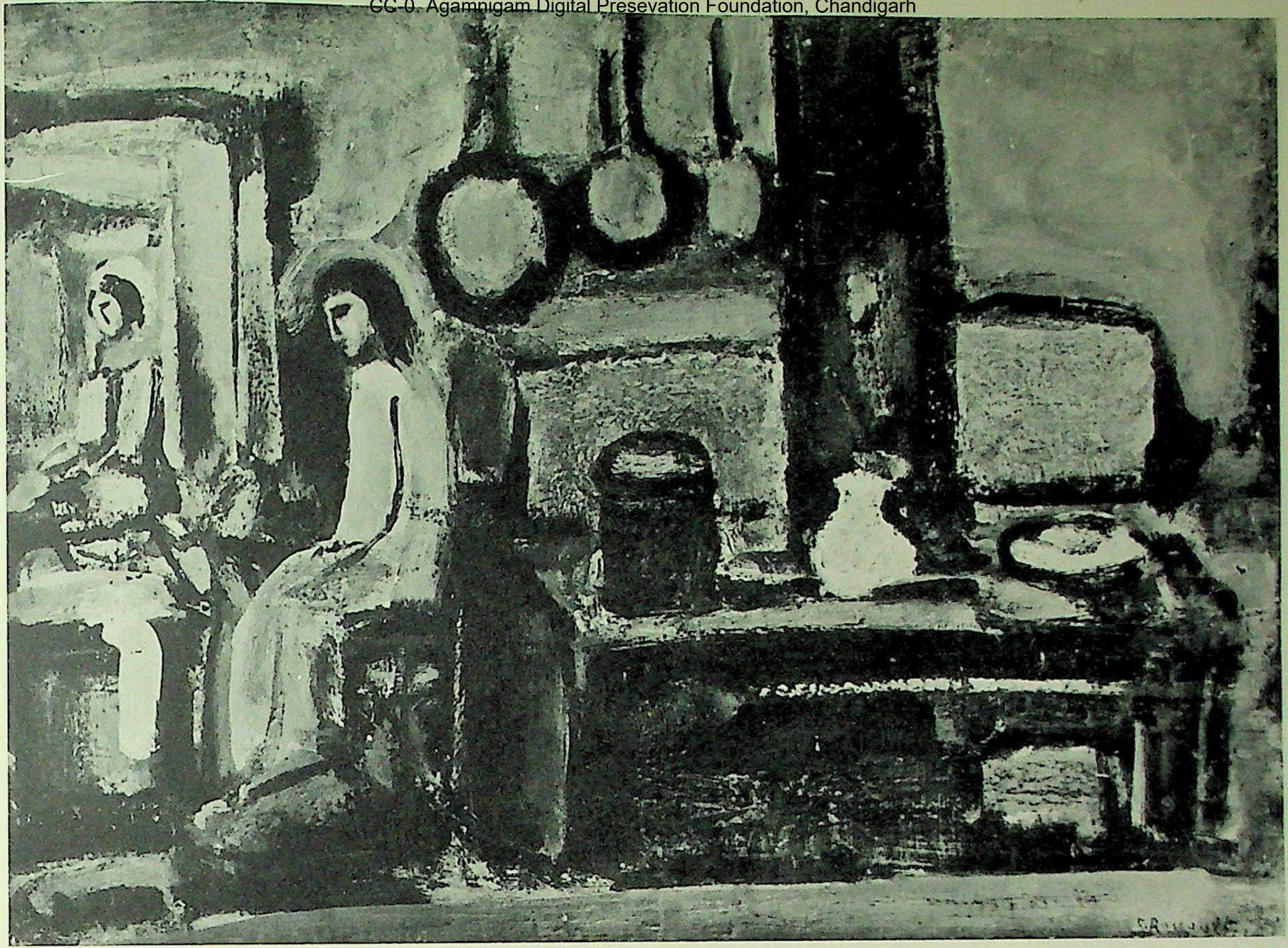
ON THE COVER: *Parade* (1907)
Private collection, Montreux, Switzerland
Gouache and pastel, 26″ × 38″

*Published by Beaverbrook Newspapers Limited in collaboration with Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated.* *Copyright in Great Britain, United States, and foreign countries under International Copyright Convention*
*All rights reserved under Pan-American Convention*

*Printed in Great Britain by Jarrold and Sons Limited, Norwich*

*© Beaverbrook Newspapers Ltd., 1958*

BEAVERBROOK NEWSPAPERS LIMITED
121 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

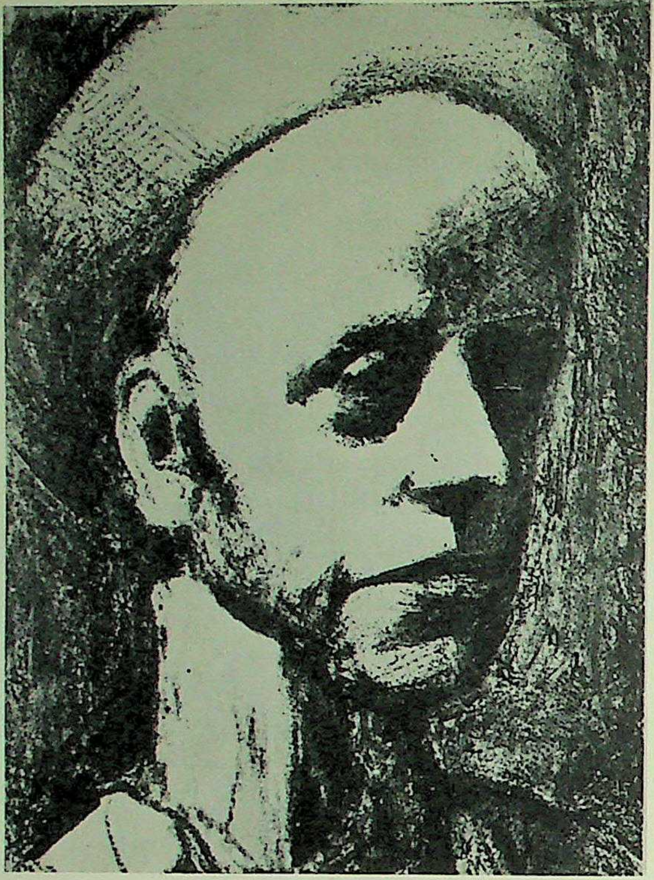


THE OLD SUBURB (Oil) *Carstairs Gallery, New York*

# GEORGES ROUAULT

### *TEXT BY* JACQUES MARITAIN

ROUAULT LIKES TO RECALL the fact that he was born in a cellar, during the Prussian bombardment of Paris in 1871. From the darkness of this birthplace, in the underground recesses of an ungrateful earth, to the light of the freest and most powerful blossoming forth of the spiritual energies of art—so I see his story. When I first met him, he was engaged in a particularly sombre phase of that "struggle of the spirit" of which Rimbaud spoke, and which is "harder than the struggle of man". He was disregarded, forsaken, condemned by his friends and fellow-painters, who charitably lamented the way in which the author of *The Child Jesus among the Doctors* had turned mad and wasted his promising gifts—and at the same time he was searching within himself in obscurity, with that kind of anguish which belongs to great discoverers, and which is not really anguish, for in it dwells the certainty of an inner infallible calling, and it nourishes heroic stubbornness. Now Rouault is at the peak of glory, and has entered the realm of the master classics of painting. He has solved the life-and-death problems of modern painting for himself and in his own way, by dint of concentration and strenuous work. Yet his way is a way in which one walks alone. After having



SELF-PORTRAIT (Lithograph) *Brooklyn Museum, New York*

stored in the mind a treasure of knowledge and experience on which a generation of searchers could live, but which is incommunicable, every great creator is more solitary than ever. It is through his work that the communication takes place: let him understand who can.

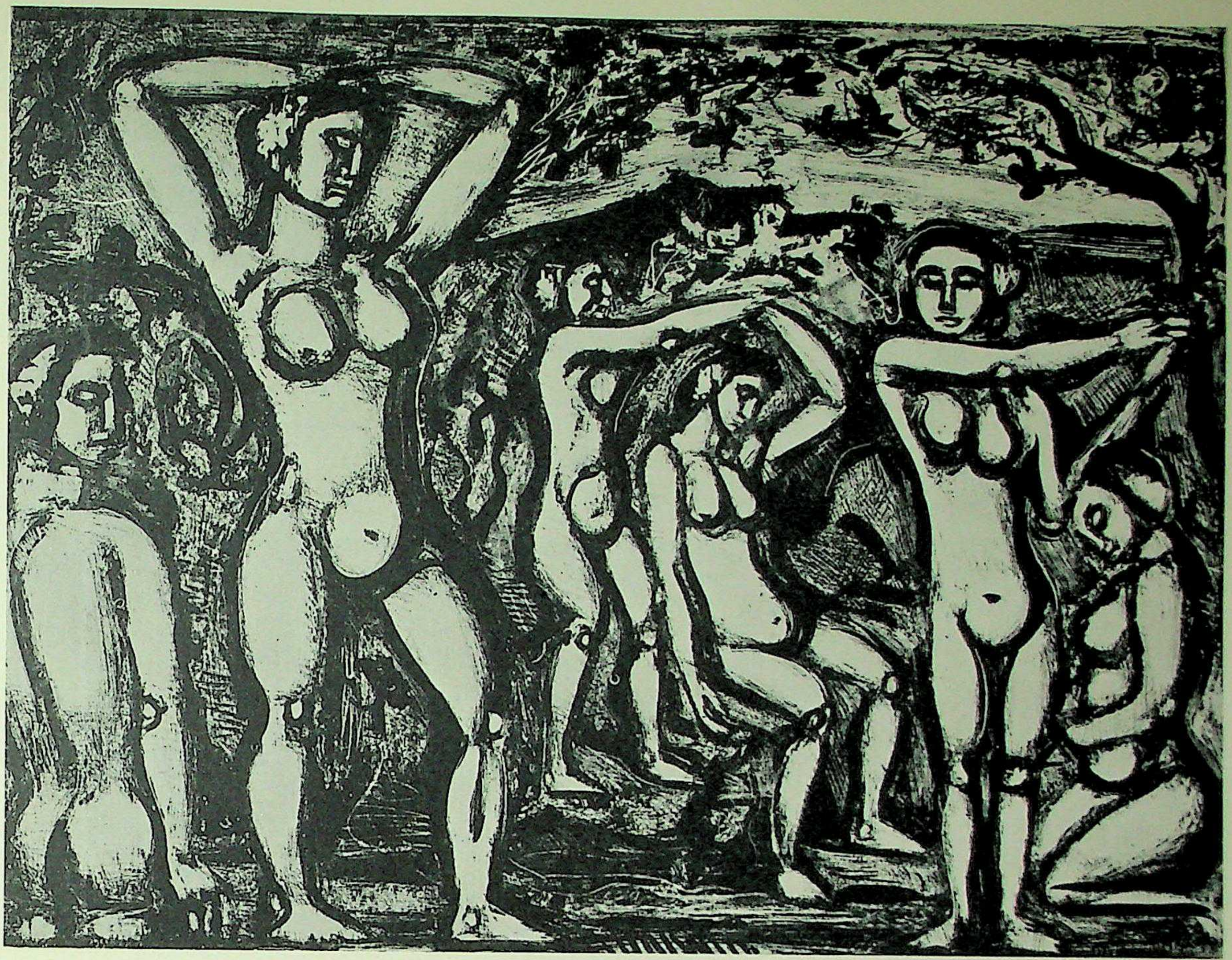
The point I should like to make deals with the superior power of vital synthesis—triumphing over the contrasting requirements and contrasting dangers with which the creative mind meets—an outstanding example of which is offered us by Rouault.

What strikes the eye first in Rouault's art—what struck the eye still more thirty or forty years ago—is its revolutionary aspect. All usual canons of beauty are shattered. Yet as the movement and internal exigencies of this art developed, its deep-rooted continuity with the masters of the past appeared more and more clearly. The relationship of a creative artist with his educators is an ambiguous one. First he is intent on appropriating both the working secrets of their craft and the moral virtues which animate them. Thus did young Rouault's love convey to him, in a kind of dawn knowledge, the influence of Gustave Moreau and of Rembrandt. But then a need for liberation awakens, perhaps the most vital effect of the true understanding of masters. Rouault's liberation from Moreau was definitive as concerns painting, however deep and lasting remained his gratitude and faithfulness to the human and intellectual qualities of the one who recognized his genius from the very start, yet had, so to speak, only an accidental impact on his art. Things were more involved and complex in the case of Rembrandt. A violent reaction against the hold of Rembrandt coincided with the moment when Rouault became aware of his own inner, creative needs. It was a question of saving his soul as a painter. Not only were the chiaroscuro and other technical means of Rembrandt rejected, but Rembrandt's aesthetics appeared to be spurned by a descent into the inferno of brutal and ugly, desperately laid-bare forms. And yet, after years and years, a more profound and more genuine kinship with Rembrandt was to be revealed in the art of Rouault, this time in its spirit and intangible inspiration. It is enough to look at his canvases and etchings of recent years to perceive in them a transfigured reflection of Rembrandt's sweetness, intensity, and imaginative fullness. It is beautiful to contemplate, in the evening of a painter's life, such a resurgence of the heritage—pure and spiritual—of an old master, seemingly repudiated for a time, at the very creative sources of a man who never ceased being one with him in love.

A close relationship between Rouault and Daumier has also been noted, yet this relationship remains somewhat superficial and has mainly to do, I think, with that quality of *plastic workmanship* which Rouault admires in Daumier as well as his external vision of things. I would assume that the impact of Daumier's vision was readily accepted during the first period of Rouault's research—and that Rouault freed himself from it more and more definitely, from the moment when he brushed aside not only any temptation of caricature and satirical anecdote (Daumier was a great painter, not a mere caricaturist), but also a simply pessimistic approach to reality. For tenderness and pity, and a longing for harmony, calm, and serenity are the true heart of Rouault.

Well, it is not with Daumier nor even with Rembrandt that Rouault has the deepest affinity. It is with the genuine primitives of the Romanesque Age. His similarity to them is not a matter of influence. Rather is it a matter of nature; it has to do with the essential gifts, the native poetic perception, and the native craftsman's instinct of the painter. Rouault, as a boy, was an apprentice glass-worker, and his particular use of the enveloping line and of colour makes him a brother to the medieval designers of stained glass windows. He is also, and in a still deeper sense, the brother of the sculptors of Romanesque bas-reliefs. "In the spontaneous search for a synthetic form in unison with religious consciousness," Lionello Venturi says, in his study of the painter, "Rouault has taken us back through the centuries to that moment when every image on earth was a reflected expression of God."

We find in Rouault's art not only a spontaneous reconciliation of revolutionary search and continuity with tradition. Much more essential, we find in it a unity between poetry and craftsmanship. Rouault is the son of a cabinet-maker, and he has never lost contact with the working people; he has their gravity and fierce delicacy of feeling, he detests vulgarity as they do and bourgeois philistinism more than they do. And he has a passion for all the tricks and cleverness of artisan labour, as well as for "rare materials" used in the work. No painter is richer in craftsman's knowledge, shrewdness, and sensitive accuracy. But all this is totally and absolutely subordinate in him to that "search for an internal order" and those "inner promptings", to that interior lyricism of which he often speaks, and to the freedom of creative emotion. Thus it is that, loathing "plans and programmes fixed beforehand", he discovers the organic necessities and requirements, the *truth* of each one of his works by plunging, as Cézanne did, deep into the ocean of pictorial matter, and listening with savage attention to the perfect singularity of his perceptive feeling. "*Le dessin*", he says, "*est un jet de l'esprit en éveil.*" (Drawing is a gush of the spirit on the alert.)

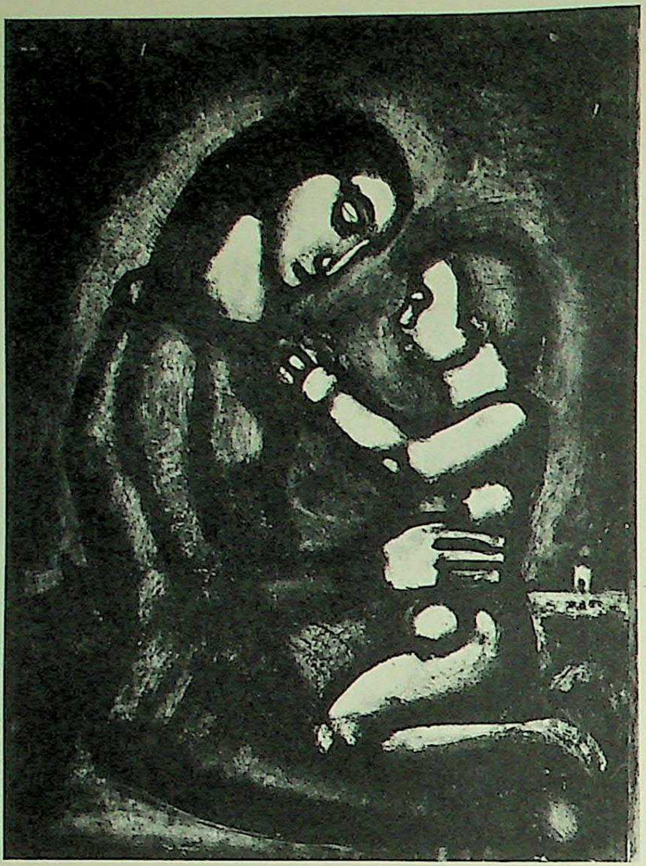


AUTUMN (Lithograph) *Museum of Modern Art, New York*

This unity of creative emotion and the working reason—with supremacy of creative emotion over all the rest—is a native privilege of any great artist. But it comes to perfection only as the final victory of a steady struggle inside the artist's soul, which has to pass through trials and "dark nights" comparable to those suffered by the mystics in their striving towards union with God. Such was the case with Rouault. I have stressed elsewhere (in *Art and Poetry*) his disinterestedness and courage, and "the *purity*—almost Jansenist, and which could become cruel—that makes his force and liberty".

The same virtues were at work in the achievement of another victory, which also has to do with the mystery of artistic creation. It is ā victory which all the great masters of modern painting have similarly won, in one way or another, but one wonders whether the generation dedicated to non-representational art may lay claim to it. I mean that the modern artist is endowed by his time with a unique privilege, given him by the progress in self-awareness made in the course of a century: he knows that the poetic process and the work of art are a revelation of the creative Self; and, by the same token, he is given an unheard-of freedom. But this very privilege and very freedom are his risk and danger too. For in turning towards his own inwardness and looking for his own conscious ability to grasp and express, he may become divided from things and imprisoned in himself; he may lose at the same time the poetic spark of creativeness, and the sense of the very work to be done—if he forgets that the creative Self cannot possibly be revealed except in the joint revelation of the reality and trans-reality of things, and of some secret meaning grasped in them. Why? Because it is in awakening to things that creativity awakens to itself, in and through that obscure and emotional knowledge—inexpressible by ideas, expressible only by the work—which is poetic knowledge, and in which such awareness itself is made into a means of grasping the world.

At this point I should like to emphasize an essential aspect of the art of Rouault, which results from that pre-eminence of creative emotion I just mentioned. It is true to say of the pictures of Rouault, as of those of the other great modern painters, that each one is a picture-story of himself. But each one is also, and by the same token, a picture-story of the mystery of things—of some interior aspect and meaning caught in the reality of the visible world, whose forms and appearances, before being recast in a new fabric on his canvas, are scrutinized by his eye implacably attentive to the most fleeting signs and nuances. Both the humility and the boldness of this painter are too great for him to turn away from that "spectacle displayed before us by *Pater Omnipotens Aeterne Deus*" of which Cézanne spoke. No painting, in our time, clings more closely than Rouault's to the secret substance of visible reality, which is there, present, inescapable, existing on its own, sometimes aggressively. This kind of "realism" is in no way realism of material appearances; it is realism of the spiritual significance of what exists (and moves, and suffers, and loves, and kills); it is realism permeated with the signs and dreams that are



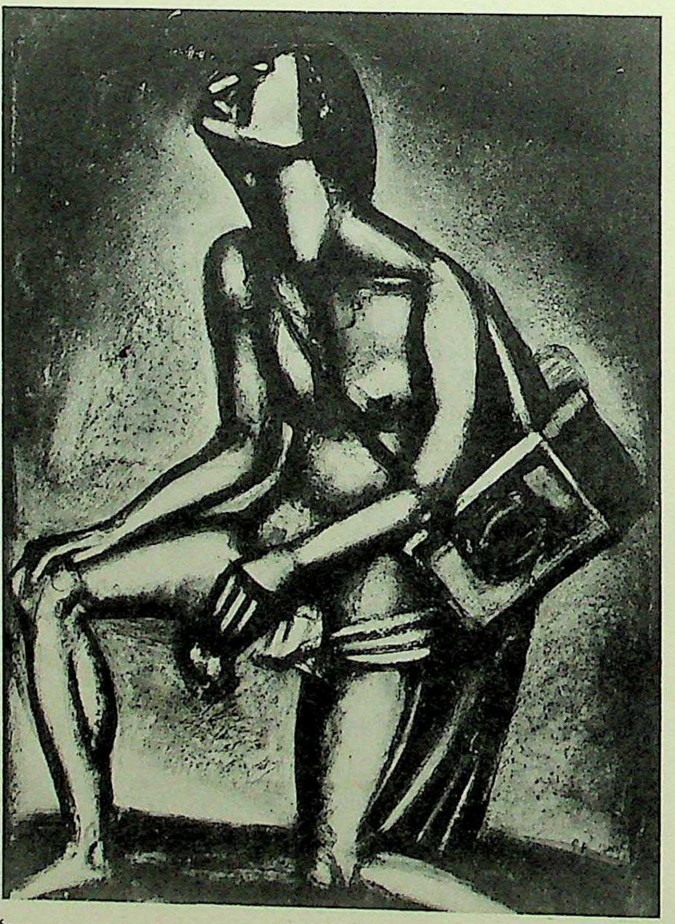
"WAR WHICH ALL MOTHERS HATE"
*From the* Miserere *Series*

amalgamated with the being of things. Rouault's realism is transfigurative, and it is one with the revealing power and poetic dynamism of a painting which remains obstinately attached to the soil while living on faith and spirituality. There is no abstraction in it, save that abstraction which brings out from things the meanings with which they are pregnant, and re-creates on the canvas or the paper the essentials, and just the essentials, of their significant elements. As regards means of expression, the preoccupation with plastic qualities has always remained central for Rouault. This preoccupation is linked in him with an anxious and touchy determination to get rid of any "literature" in the work, and to have the painting affirm itself only as painting. That is why the concern for the *contour* haunts Rouault as strongly as it did Cézanne. Like Cézanne he groans, "*Le contour me fuit.*" (The contour escapes me.) And he adds: "*Ce mot lapidaire résume toute la peinture et va bien au delà.*" (This lapidary word summarizes all painting and goes far beyond.)

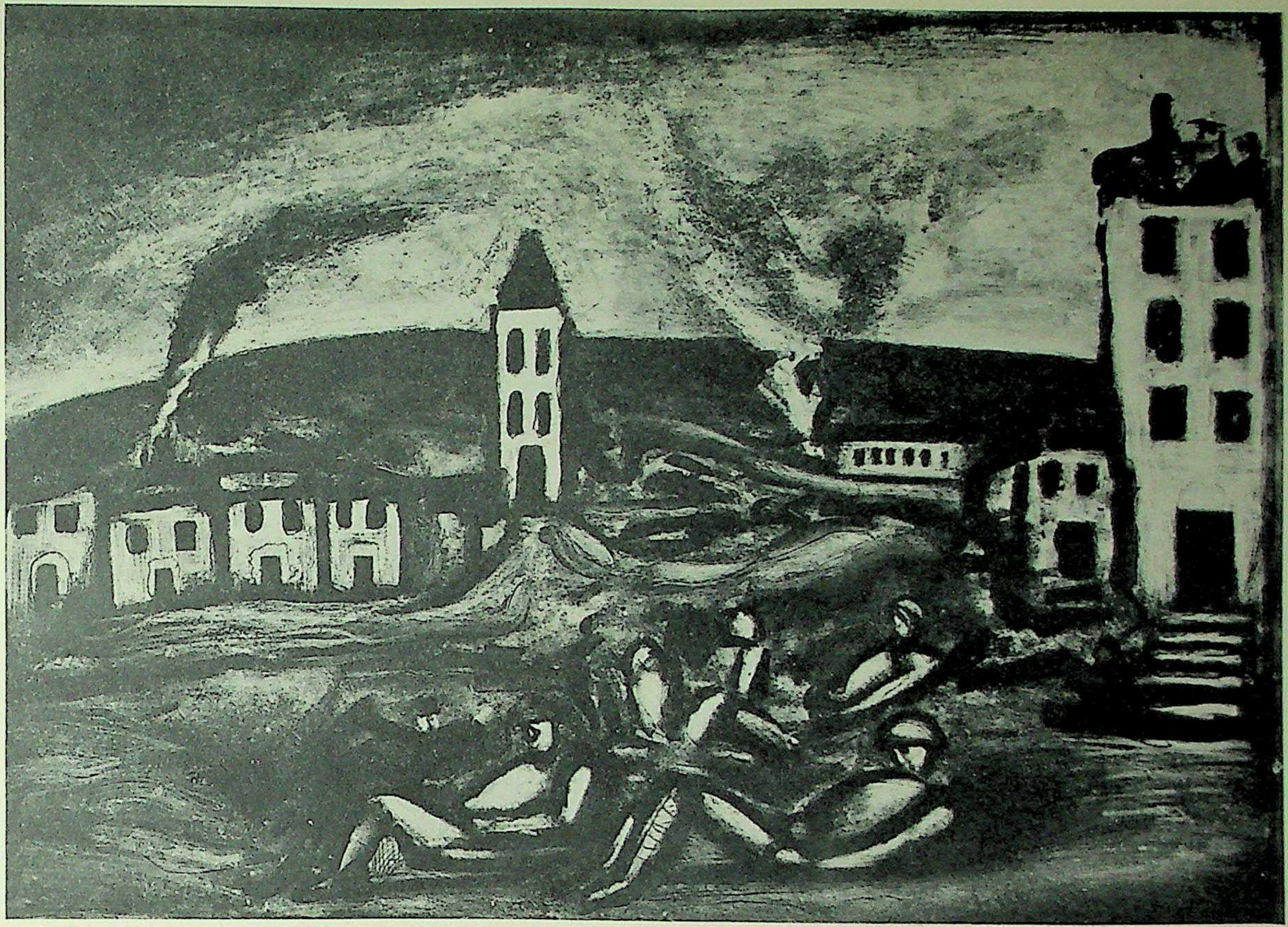
The preceding remarks enable us to realize how an art so conscious and powerful in its means and so deeply rooted in creative emotion has been able to assume without bending, a heavy burden of humanity. It is not without the reason of a profound affinity that Rouault was the friend of Huysmans and above all of Léon Bloy. Bloy did not understand anything of his painting and directed at him the most cruel and merciless reproaches; Rouault stood immobile, white with repressed anger, mute. He probably murmured in his heart, at such moments, the saying of Poussin which is dear to him: "We are producing a mute art." But in Bloy he found the intellectual objectivity he needed, and the justification of his revolt against the baseness and hypocrisy of a loveless world—and a sense of suffering and religious contemplation akin to his own. I remember this time with particular emotion. No art dealer was yet interested in him. The few friends and lovers of painting who trusted him were afraid of the direction he had taken from 1903 on. He was busy with ferocious images through which he discharged his anger; he depicted heartless and ugly judges, pitiable clowns, prostitutes, shrews, smug and arrogant upper-class ladies; he seemed committed to become the painter of original sin and of the misery of wounded humanity. He had already painted "figures of Christ with the face and body prodigiously deformed to express the paroxysm of the divine Passion and human cruelty". "Thus it was", Raïssa Maritain says (in *Adventures in Grace*), "that he uttered his horror of moral ugliness, his hatred for bourgeois mediocrity, his vehement need of justice, his pity for the poor—finally his lively and profound faith, as well as his need of absolute truth in art. This enormous load, seeking ways of expression, would have caused a less firmly rooted virtue of art to bend. In Rouault it gave but greater stature to the artist himself. Far from making him deviate, this spiritual mass weighed only in the direction of the most absolute requirement for genuine expression in a work—according, that is, to the most absolute requirement of art."

It is not difficult to perceive that, in this dark period, the prime incentive which moved the feelings of the painter was in reality a desperate yearning for peace and hope and fraternal generosity among men; it was compassion and love. "Beauty is the form that love gives to things", Ernest Hello said. How could ugliness fail to spoil the forms of a world which love seemed to have deserted? "I believe in suffering," Rouault has written, "it is not feigned in me. This is my only merit. I was not made to be so terrible."

He is now very far from this dark period. He emerged from it by virtue of the inner necessities of the process



"IN ALL THINGS TEARS" *From the* Miserere *Series*



MY SWEET HOMELAND, WHAT HAS BECOME OF YOU? *From the* Miserere *Series*

of his art. To the extent to which his own spiritual experience became deeper, creative emotion was also to take place in deeper regions of his soul, farther from the noise of the external world; and at the same time the urgency of plastic expression developed a purer and freer urge toward harmonic expansion. As a result, Rouault's painting entered a sphere of growing light and clarity. It disclosed to us, more and more manifestly, a plenitude of masses, a lively elegance of the arabesque, and a rigorous and severe harmony which appear in the glory of exquisitely nuanced and sumptuous colour and the transparency of the most precious matter. A touch of Greek order and beauty even passes sometimes in his work and strikes our eyes—just as in certain statues in medieval cathedrals. Compassion and pity are always there, extending to all the distress of the human condition. But bitterness and anger have been superseded both by larger emotion and by a dominating sense of the musical nobility of forms. All that is summed up, so to speak, in the admirable plates of the *Miserere*.

This could all be sensed from the start in those landscapes which are, to my mind, one of the most moving and powerful parts of the work of Rouault. Landscapes of dream and misery, in which the element of romanticism that exists in the painter is less repressed than elsewhere, their infinite melancholy is that of human distress and abandonment assumed and purified by the peace and serenity of a compassionate nature.

Yet it is in the field of religious art that the steady ascent towards the light of which I am speaking has most definitely shown itself. Even at the time of his enraged pictures of a cruel and sinful world, Rouault worked at religious subjects. Here we are in the presence of a life-long effort which has never been interrupted. But with his extraordinary patience and his sense (this is a secret of his power) of the natural growth of living forces which must never be artificially hurried, Rouault waited for the moment when the essential orientation of his heart, and his hard struggle towards peace and clarity would overcome the entanglements of art and matter and gain mastery. He is now recognized as the greatest religious painter of our time; one of the greatest religious painters of the ages. This was a triumph of evangelical feeling and of spiritual inwardness. In his scenes of the Passion, paroxysmic deformation has been superceded by the majesty of a suffering which, before coming from the wickedness of tormentors, comes from the very will of the Lamb of God offering Himself by love. The imprint of Christ's face on Veronica's veil, which Rouault never tires of depicting, seems to mean for him the imprint of divine mercy on human art. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of the resurgence of religious painting that is owed to Rouault. As Maurice Morel rightly pointed out, the image of the Crucifixion, the "capital sign of Christianity", has been freed by him from that academicism to which it seemed condemned for two centuries, even in the works of great painters. Let us stress this significant fact: it is through the inspiration of his faith, and of the thoughtful reminders which are his hidden treasure, that the poetry, the flash of poetic intuition which quicken the art of Rouault, have reached full freedom and full scope, in a painting which, more than ever, remains strictly painting. Thus it is that "the most humanly and morally pathetic art of our time" was raised to hieratic grandeur.

At the end of his preface to the current edition of the *Miserere*, Rouault has printed one of the naïve songs in which he communicates to us some of his thoughts:

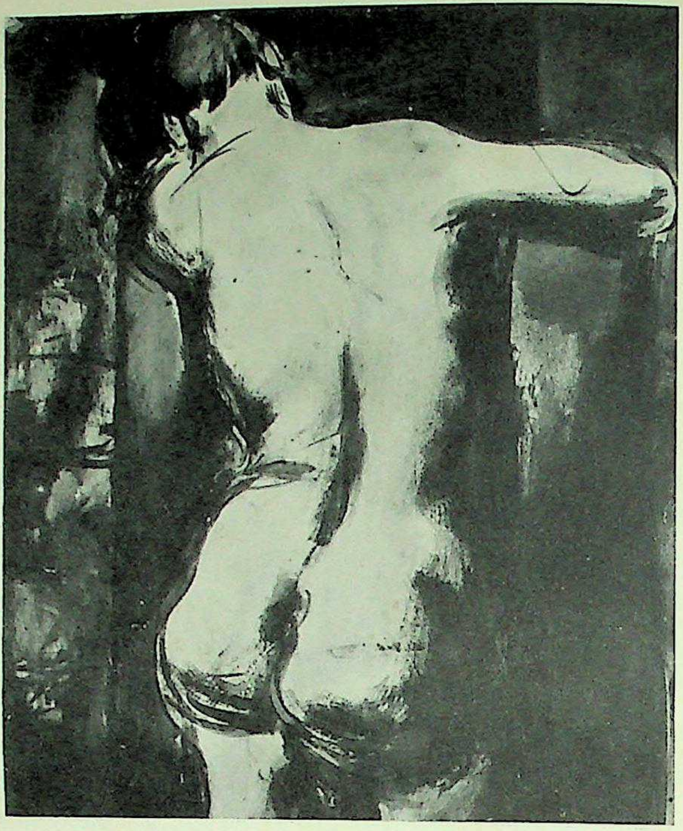
*Form, colour, harmony*
*Oasis or mirage*
*For the eyes, the heart, or the spirit*

*Toward the moving ocean of pictorial appeal*
*"Tomorrow will be beautiful," said the*
*shipwrecked man*
*Before disappearing beneath the sullen horizon*

*Peace seems scarcely to rule*
*Over the anguished world*
*Of shadows and appearances*

*Jesus on the cross will tell you better than I*
*Jeanne at her trial in her brief and sublime replies*
*As well as the obscure or consecrated*
*Saints and martyrs.*

Let us remember the painter's lines as we look at the remarkable plates contained in this volume.


NUDE TORSO (Gouache) *The Art Institute of Chicago*

* * *

It is of course impossible for a limited number of pictures chosen from an immense production to cover all the aspects of work like that of Rouault. More plates would be needed, in particular, to illustrate the latest stages of that slow ascent I mentioned above towards hieratic balance in religious painting and, more generally, toward classical nobility of form—though the freedom and elegance of the contours in the *Seated Clown* already appear quite significant in this regard. The fact remains that the pictures reproduced in this volume are enough to give us an idea of the main tendencies and the various approaches to painting which are at play in the work of Rouault. Here we have the painter of translucid matter (*Bouquet*, 1938; *Three Clowns*, 1917), the painter of sinful and pitiable flesh (*Nudes*, 1907), the painter of the dereliction and agony of Christ (*Christ Mocked by Soldiers*, 1932; *Crucifixion*, 1918), the painter of pathetic landscapes in communion with the dreams and sorrow of man (*The Funeral*, 1930). A striking example of the exclusively pictorial *poetry* of Rouault appears in that extraordinary landscape, *Christ and Two Disciples* (1935), which conveys to our eye and our heart, in one single intuitive flash, the nostalgic clamour of a world illumined by the blood and compassion of its Saviour. Through its musical intensity of colour and its liberty of emotional idealism this canvas is in my opinion one of the most revealing works of Georges Rouault.

THE TITLE, SIZE, AND OTHER PERTINENT DATA ON THE PAINTINGS THAT FOLLOW WILL BE FOUND BY LIFTING EACH REPRODUCTION

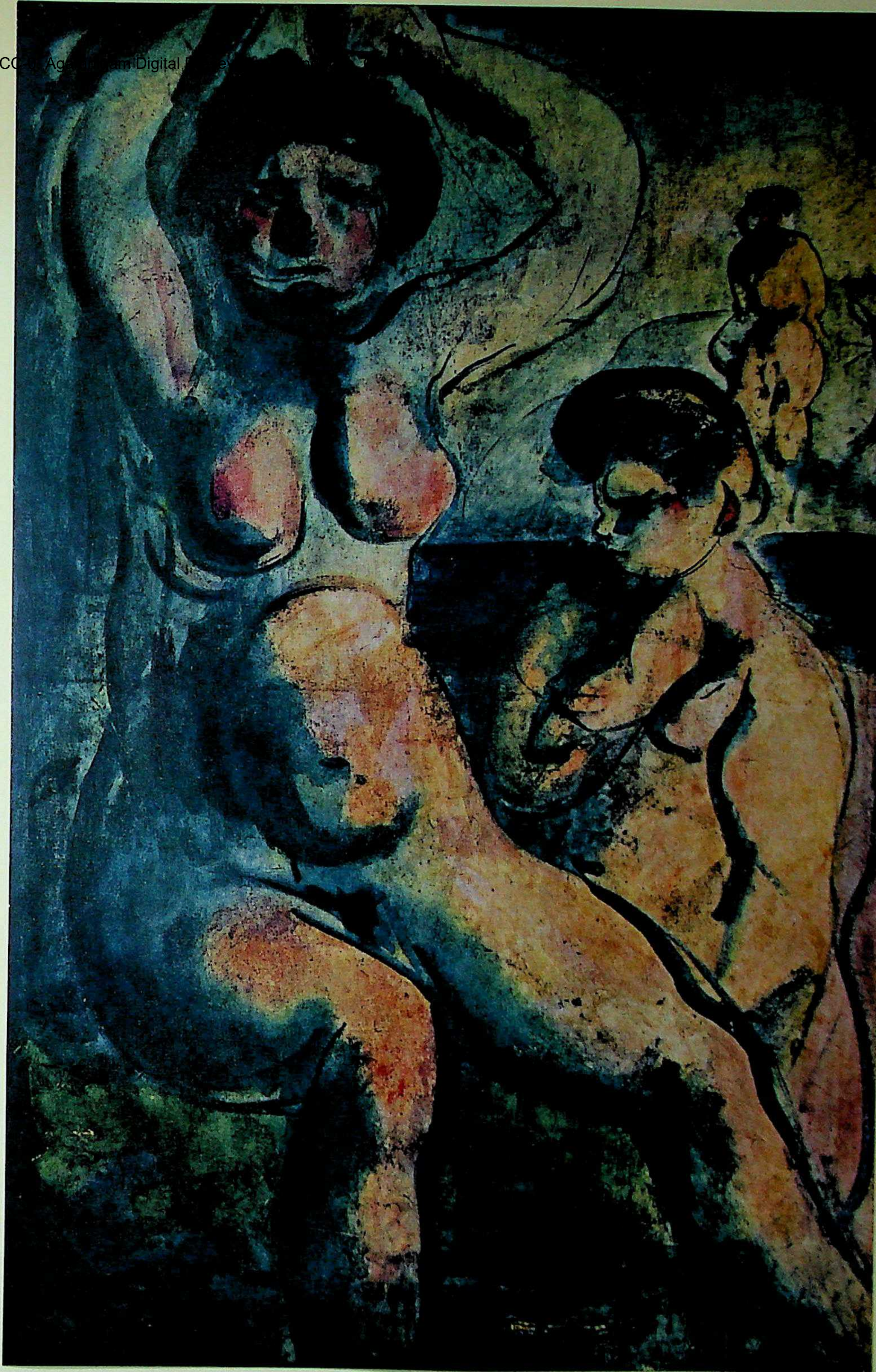
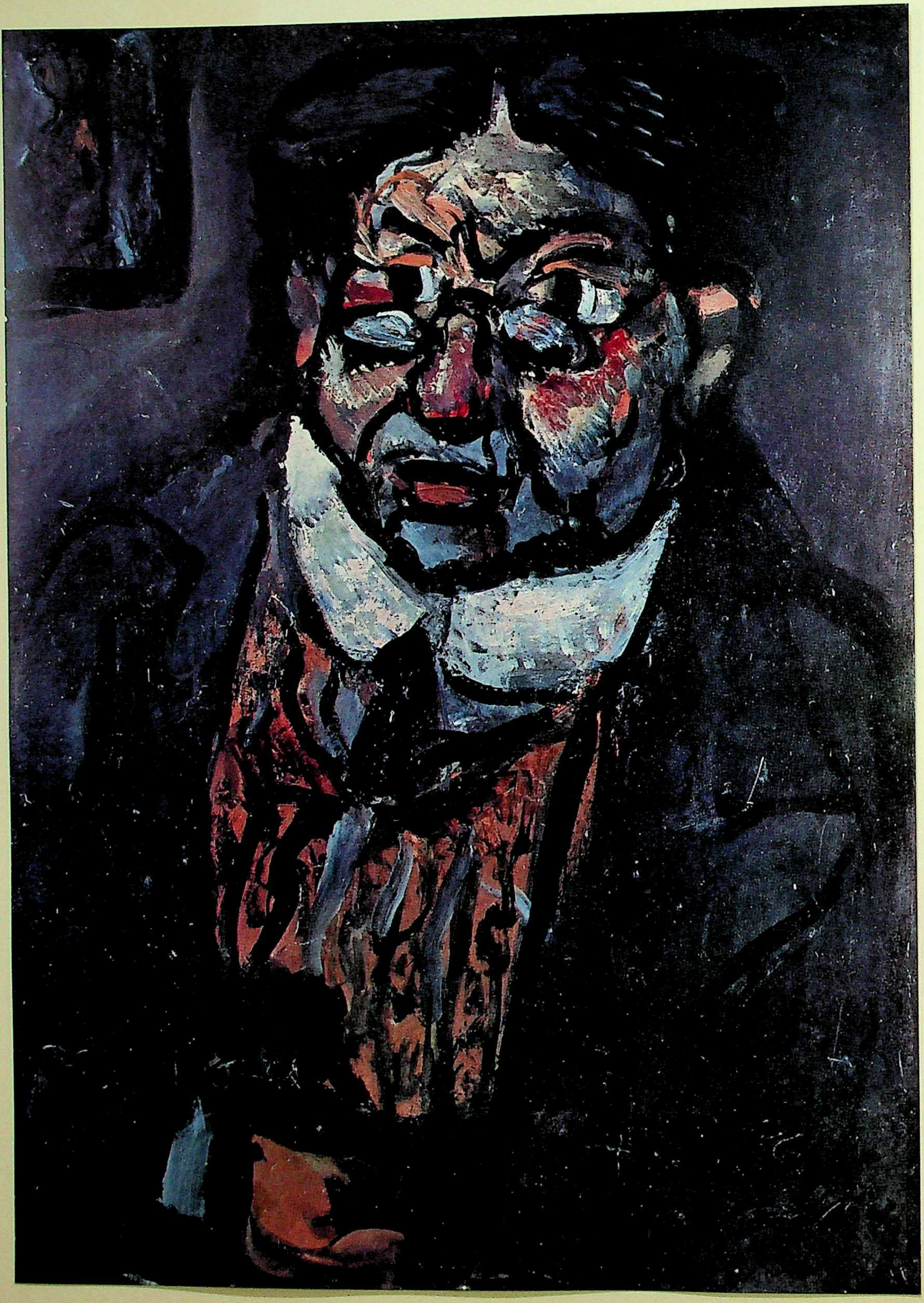
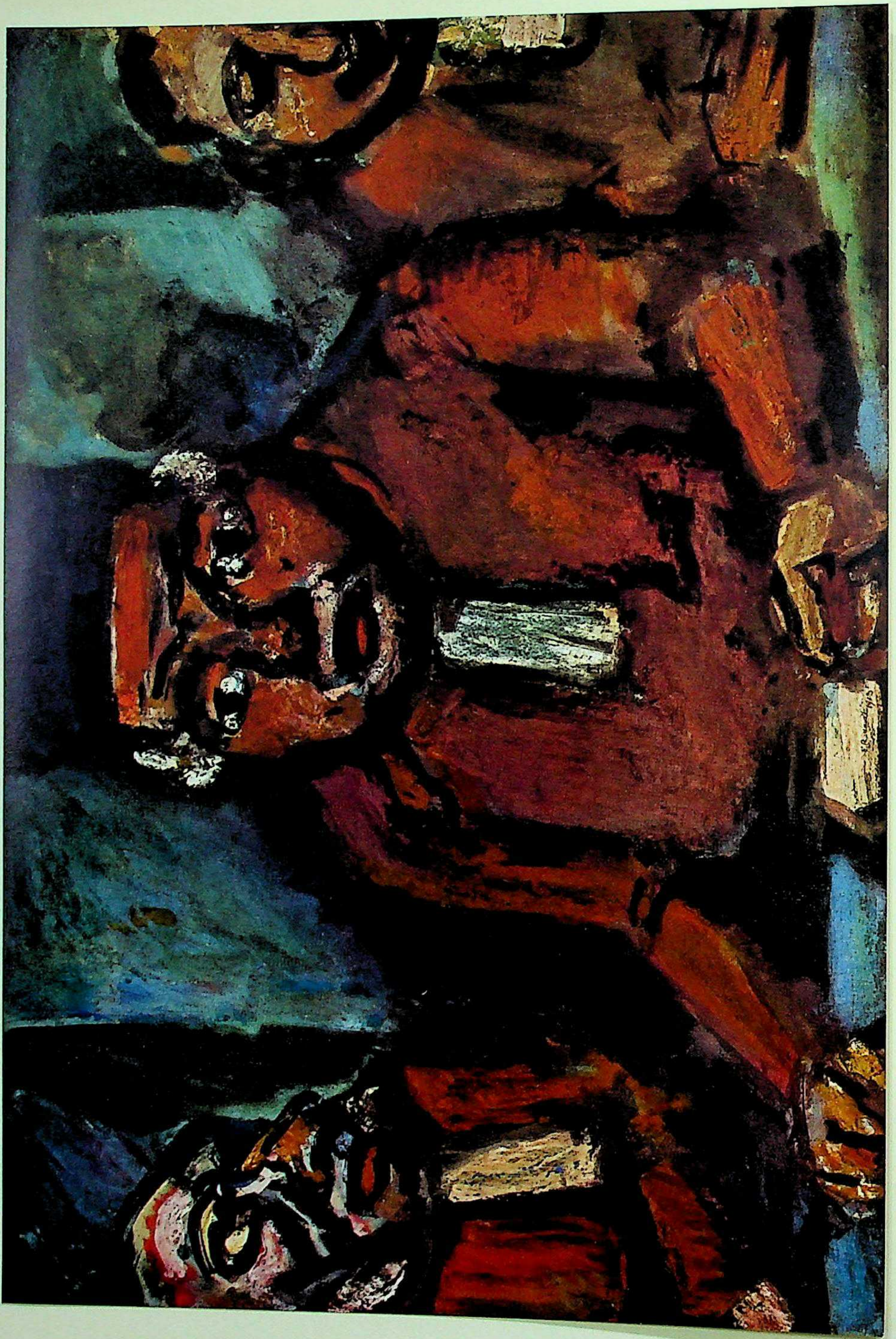


PLATE TWO
NUDES (about 1907)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Harry N. Abrams
Oil and gouache, 39½″ × 25½″



ROUAULT

**PLATE THREE**
MR. X (1911)
Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo
Oil, 30¼" × 22¼"



ROUAULT

PLATE FOUR
THREE JUDGES (1918)
Museum of Modern Art, New York (Bequest of Sam A. Lewisohn)
Oil and gouache, 29⅞" × 41⅝"

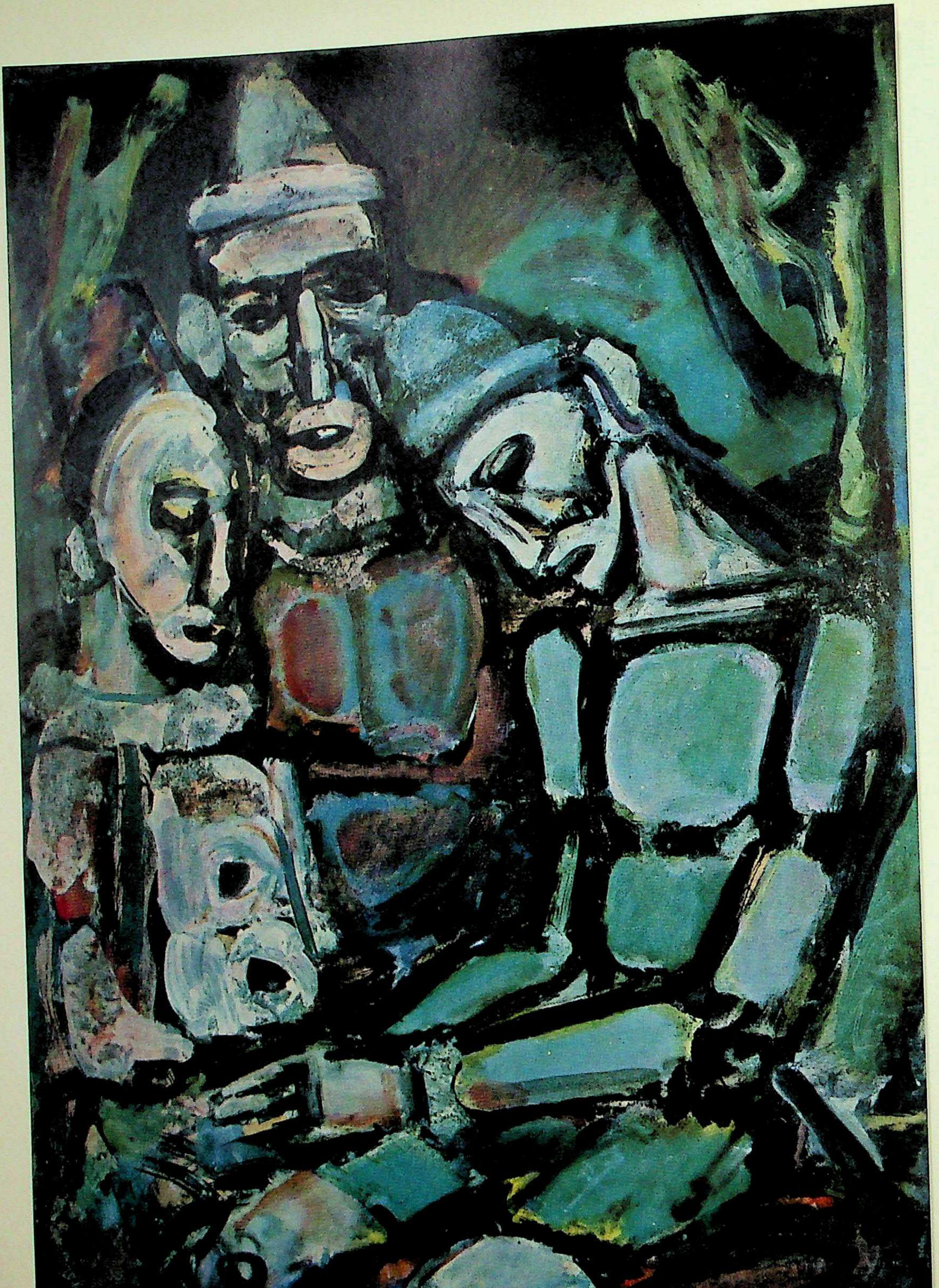
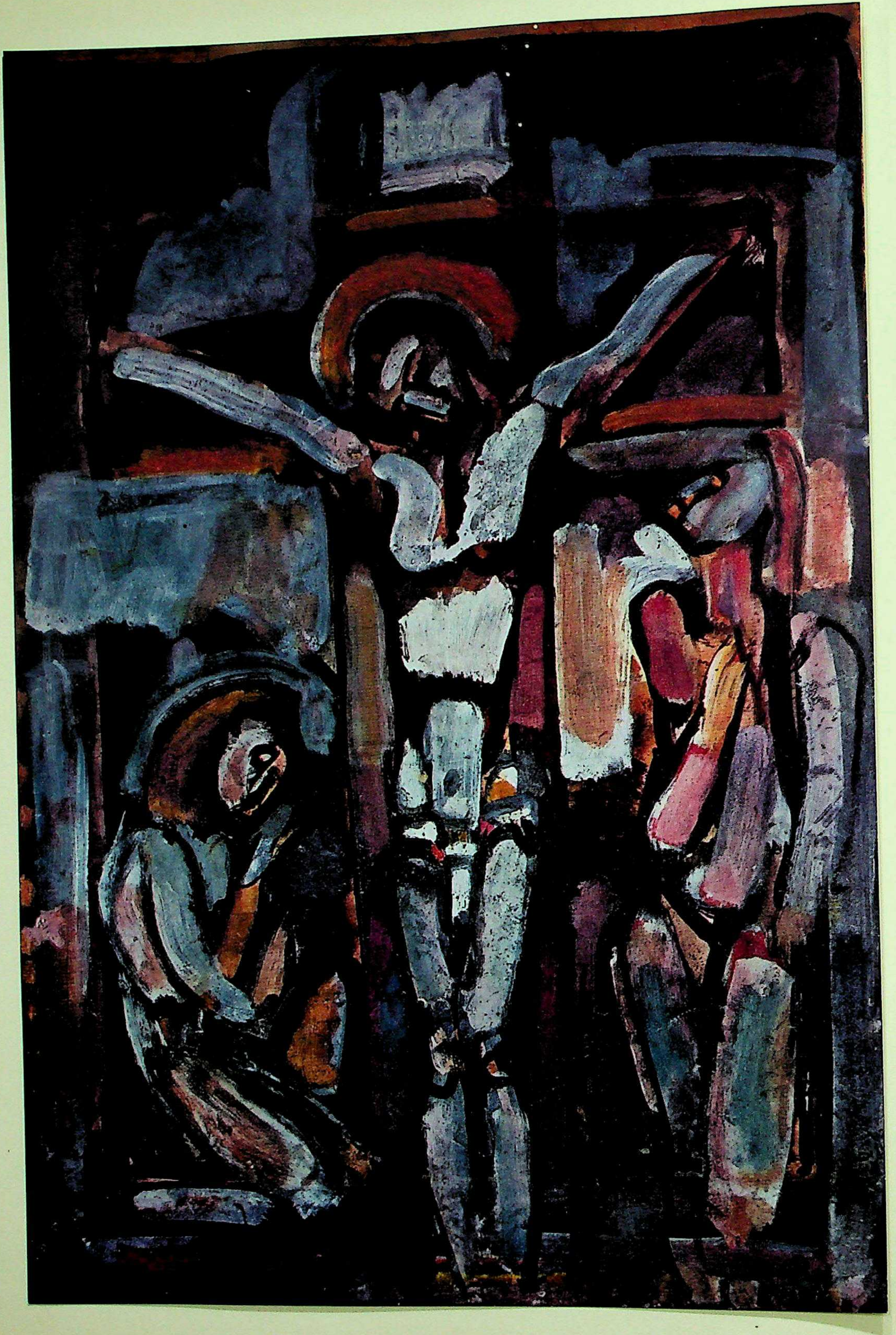


PLATE FIVE

THREE CLOWNS (1917)

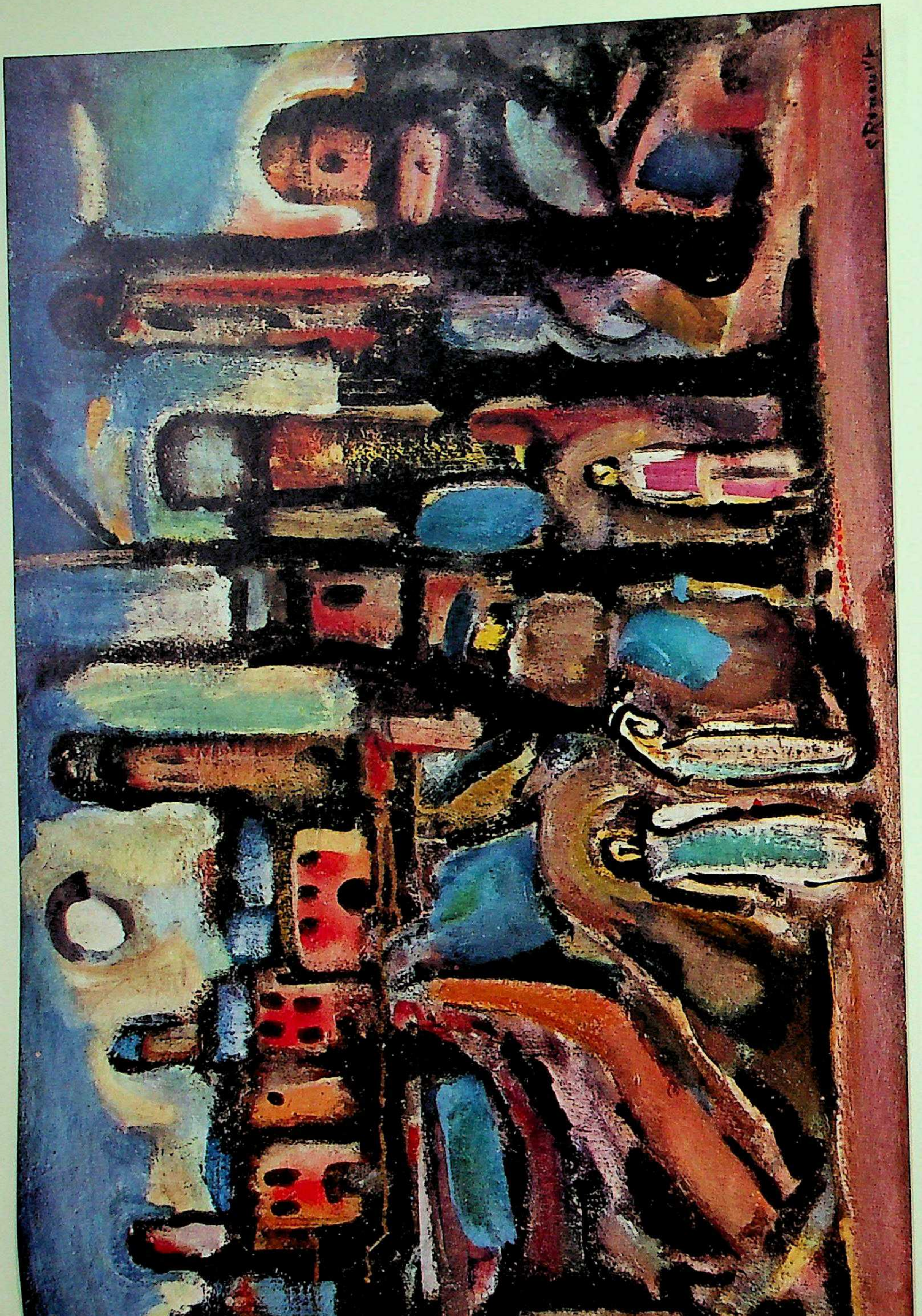
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr.

Oil, 41″ × 29¼″



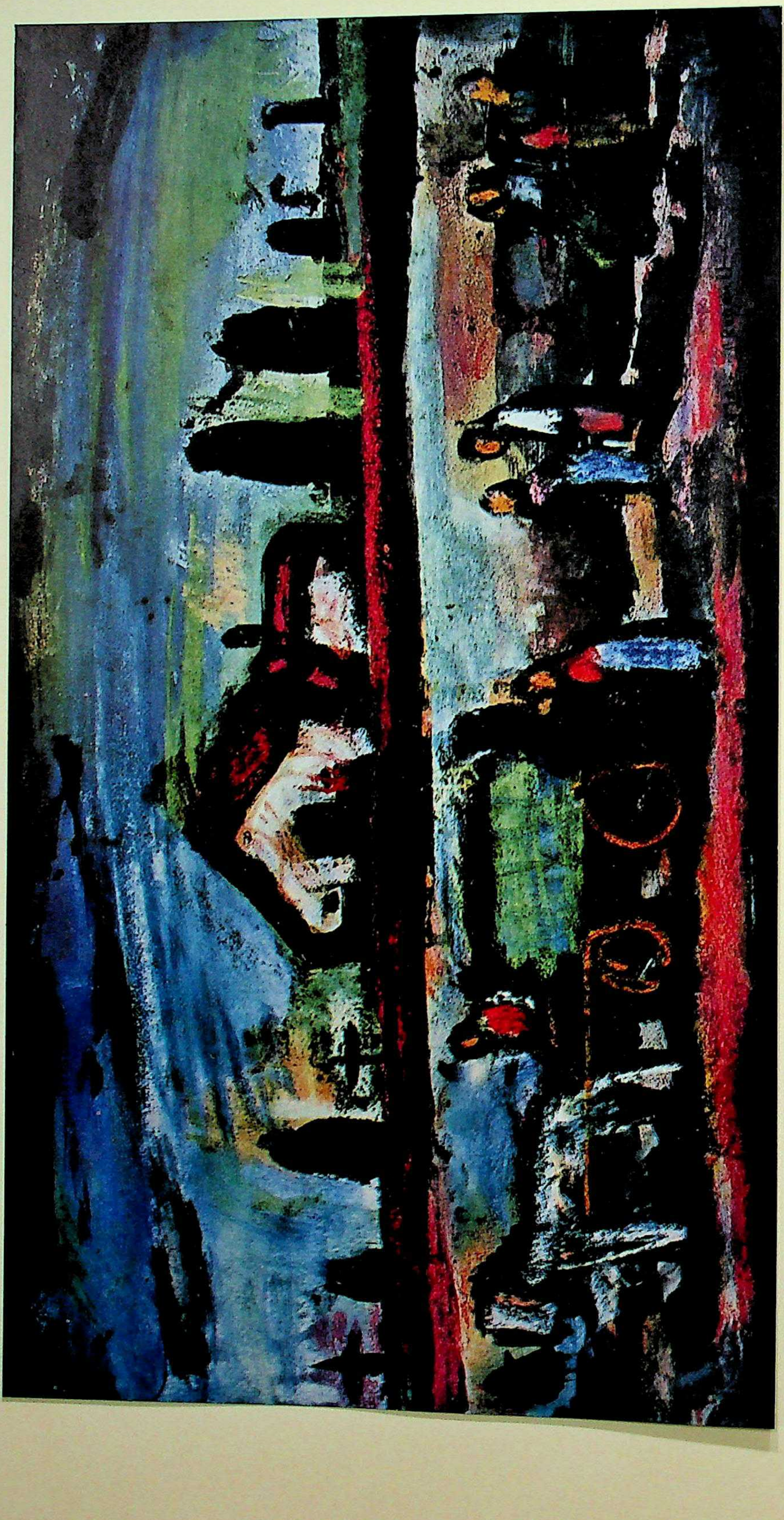
ROUAULT

PLATE SIX
CRUCIFIXION (about 1918)
Collection Henry P. McIlhenny
Oil and gouache, 41¼″×29⅝″


G Rouault

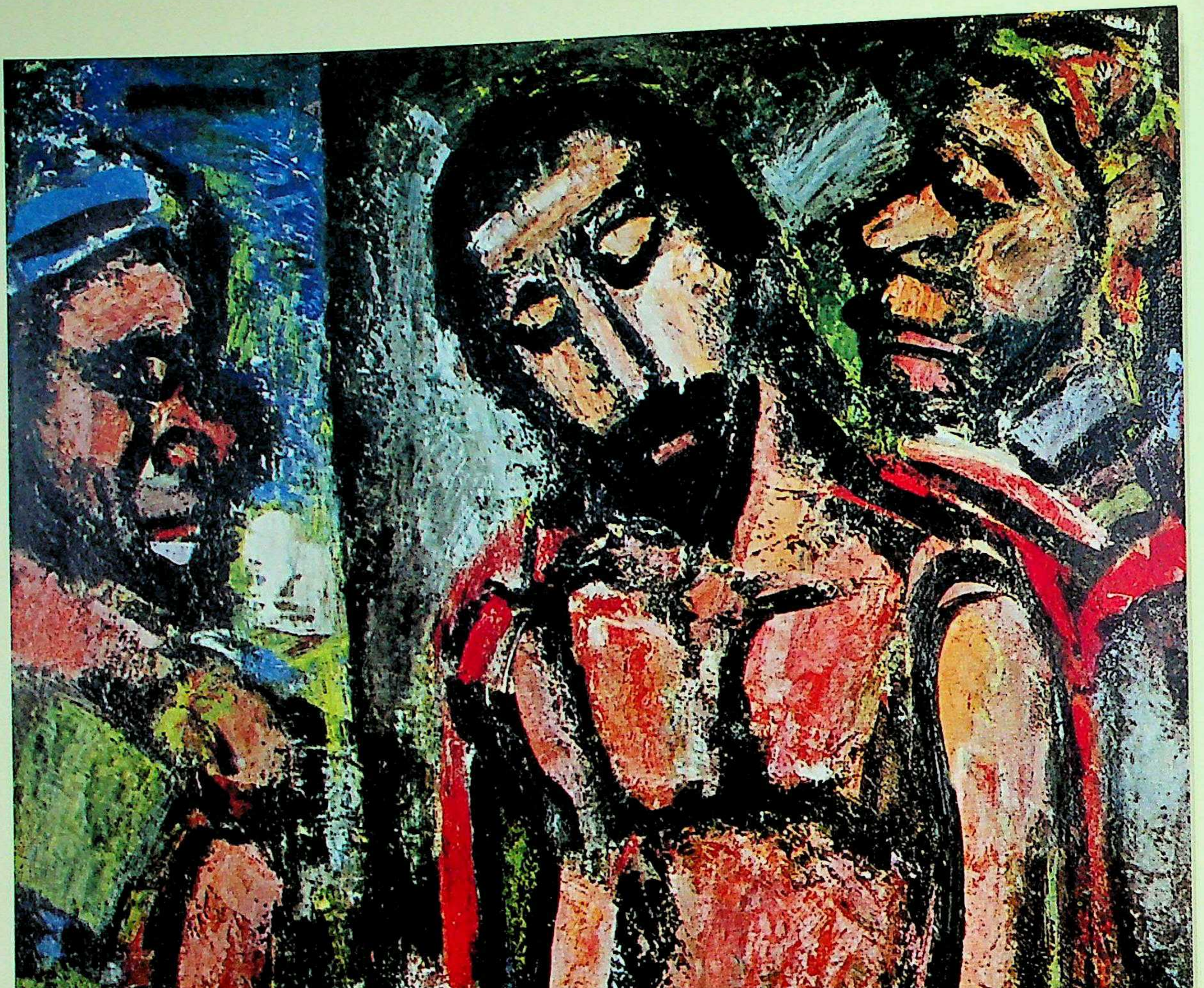
ROUAULT

PLATE SEVEN
THE HUMANE LANDSCAPE (1928)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Nate B. Spingold
Oil, 25½″ × 39″



ROUAULT

PLATE EIGHT
THE FUNERAL (1930)
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gouache and pastel, 11″×19⅜″



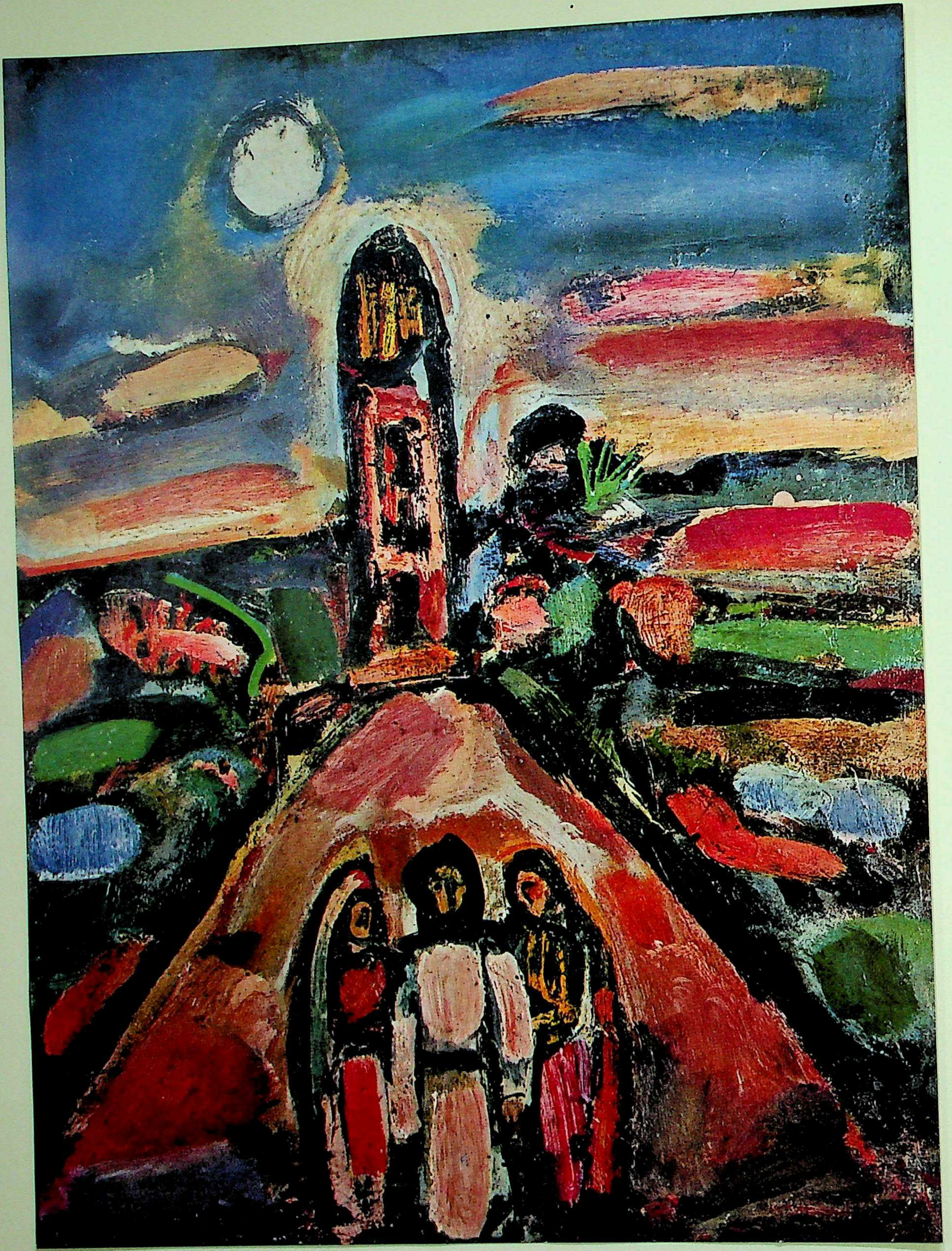
ROUAULT

PLATE NINE

CHRIST MOCKED BY SOLDIERS (1932)

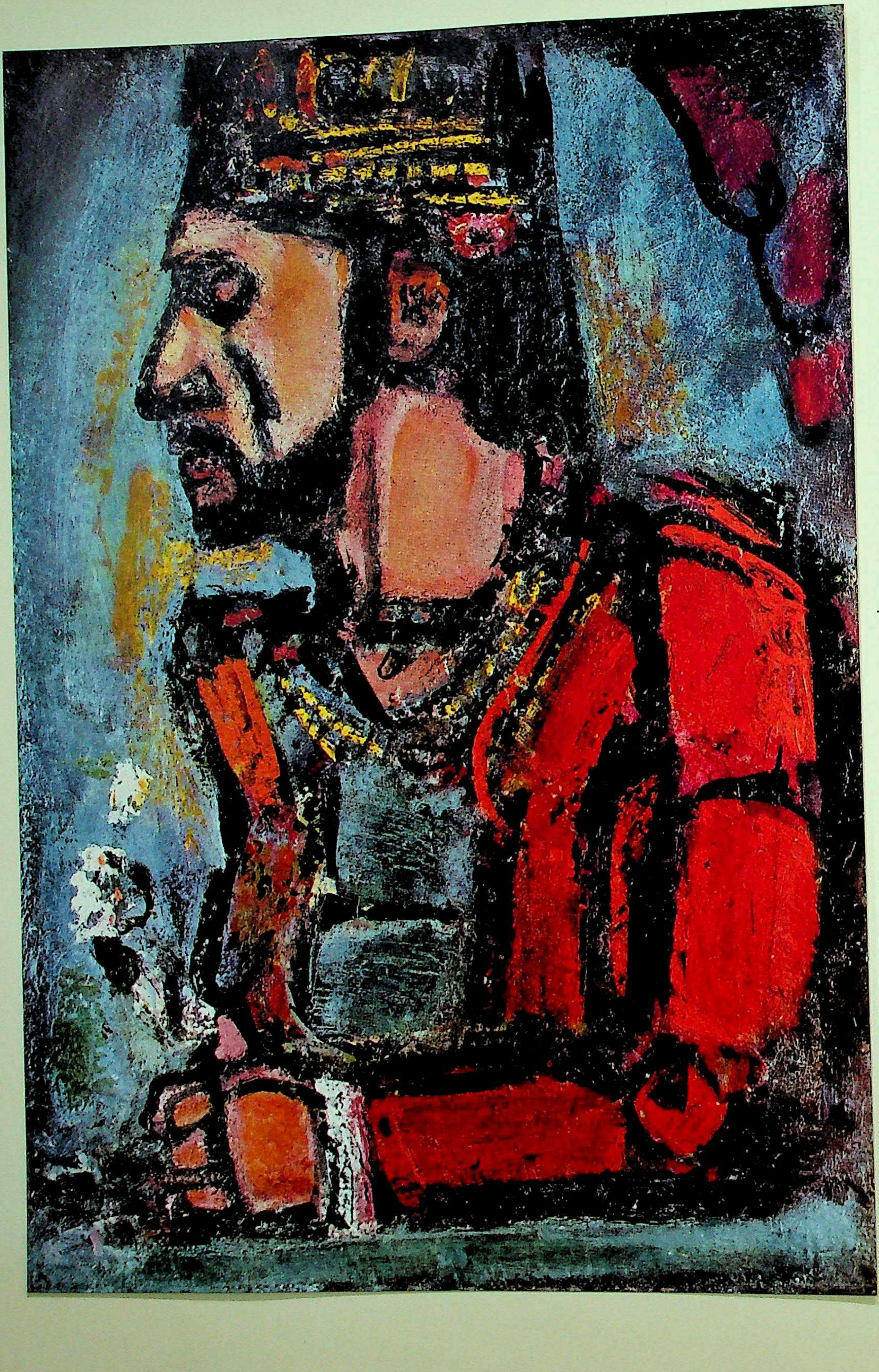
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Oil, 36¼″ × 28½″



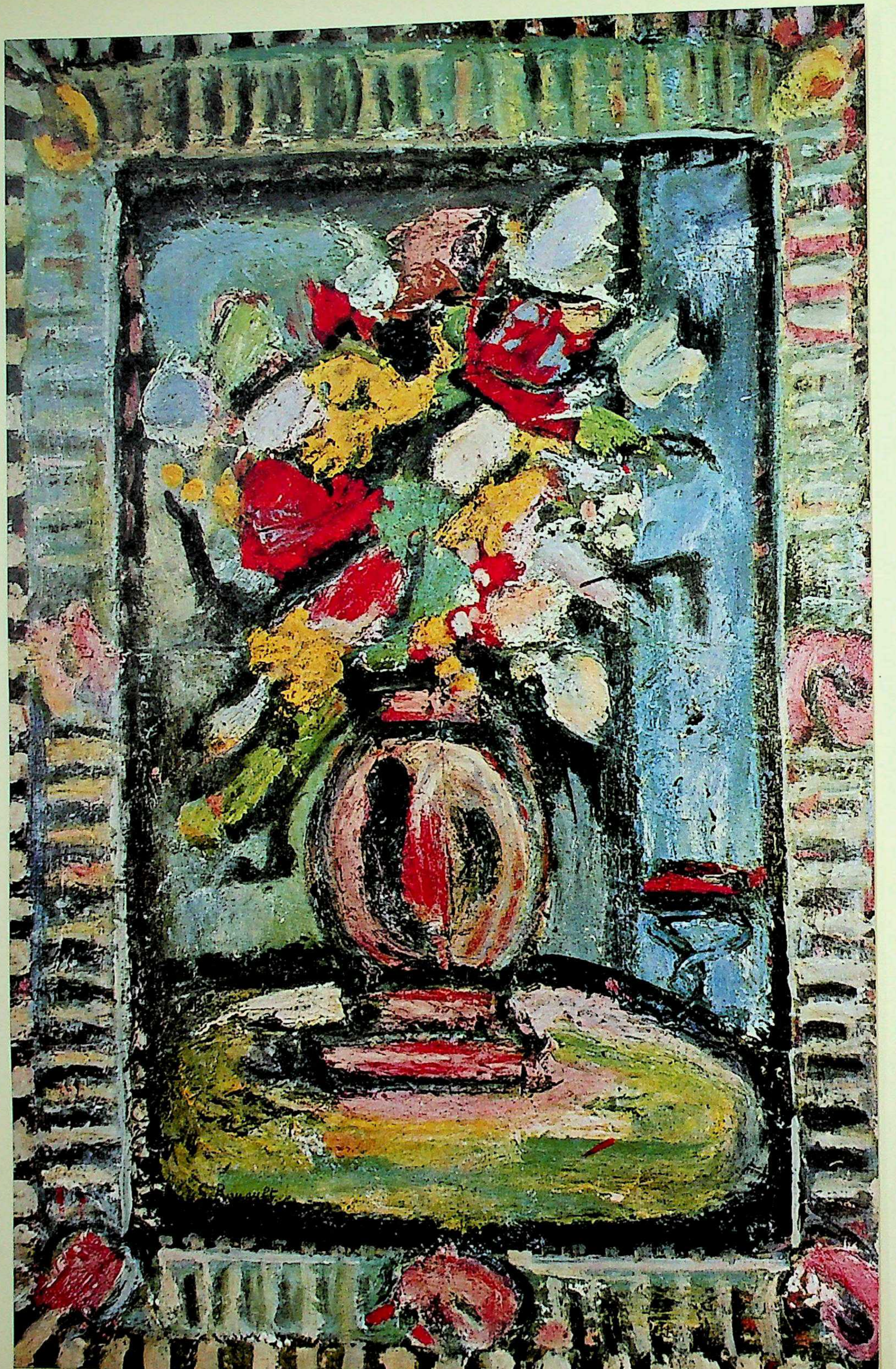
ROUAULT

PLATE TEN
CHRIST AND TWO DISCIPLES (about 1935)
Collection Julian and Joachim Jean Aberbach
Oil, 27½″×21½″



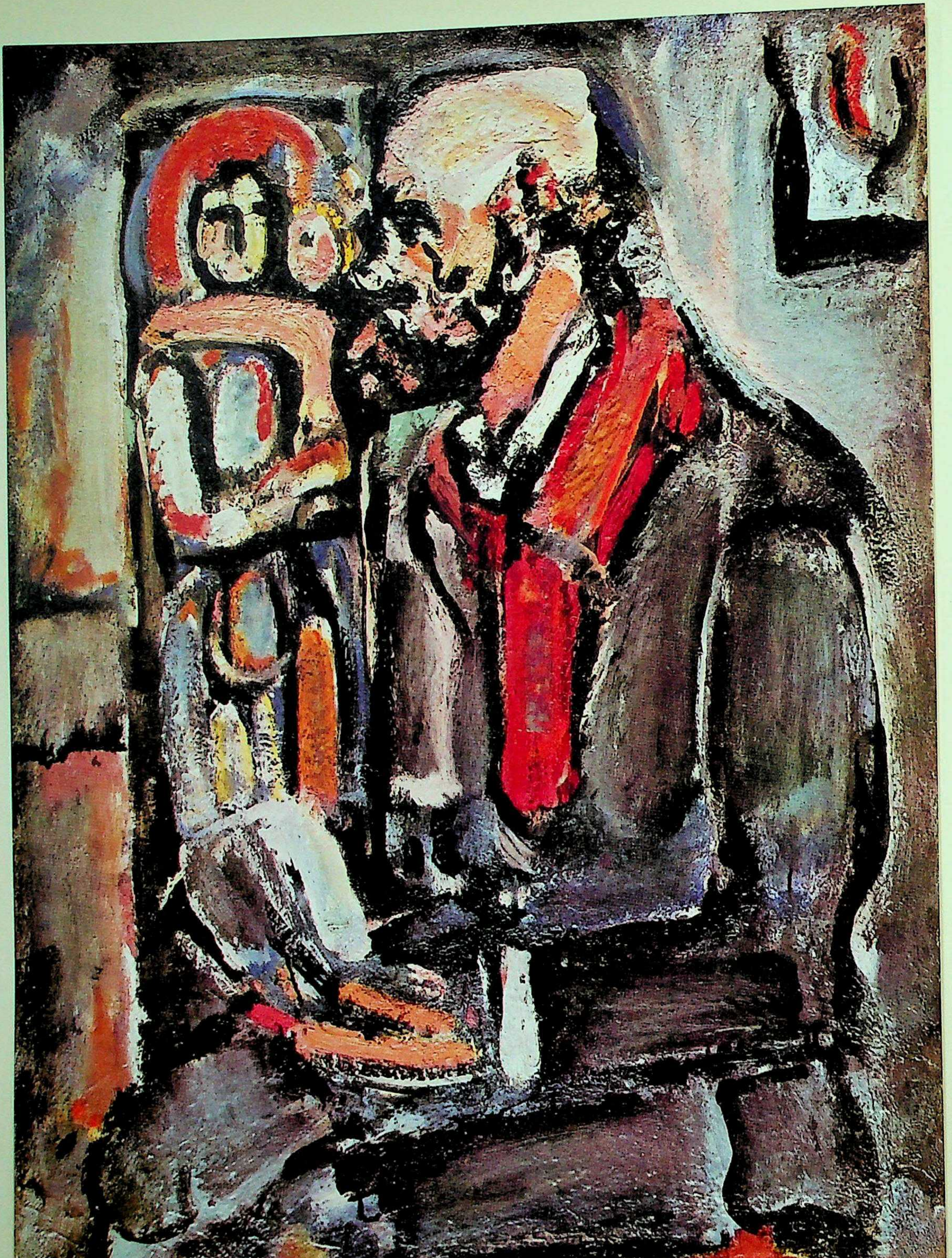
ROUAULT

PLATE ELEVEN
THE OLD KING (1916–36)
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh
Oil, 30¼″×21¼″



ROUAULT

PLATE TWELVE
BOUQUET (about 1938)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin
Oil, 35″×23¾″



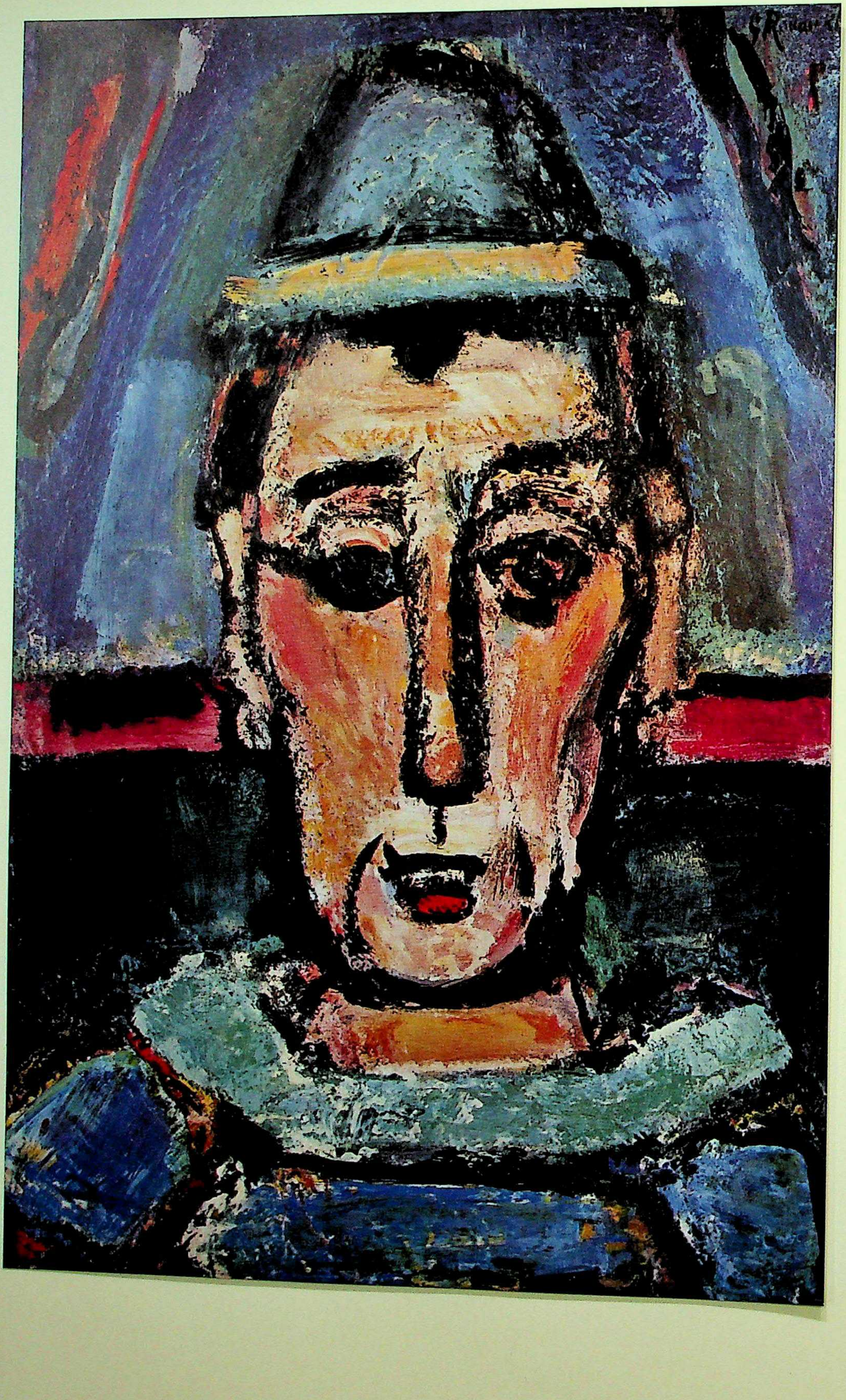
ROUAULT

PLATE THIRTEEN

PORTRAIT OF VERLAINE (about 1938)

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Oil, 39¾″ × 29⅛″



ROUAULT

PLATE FOURTEEN
THE ENGLISH CLOWN (1938-39)
Collection Edward G. Robinson
Oil, 25″ × 17″

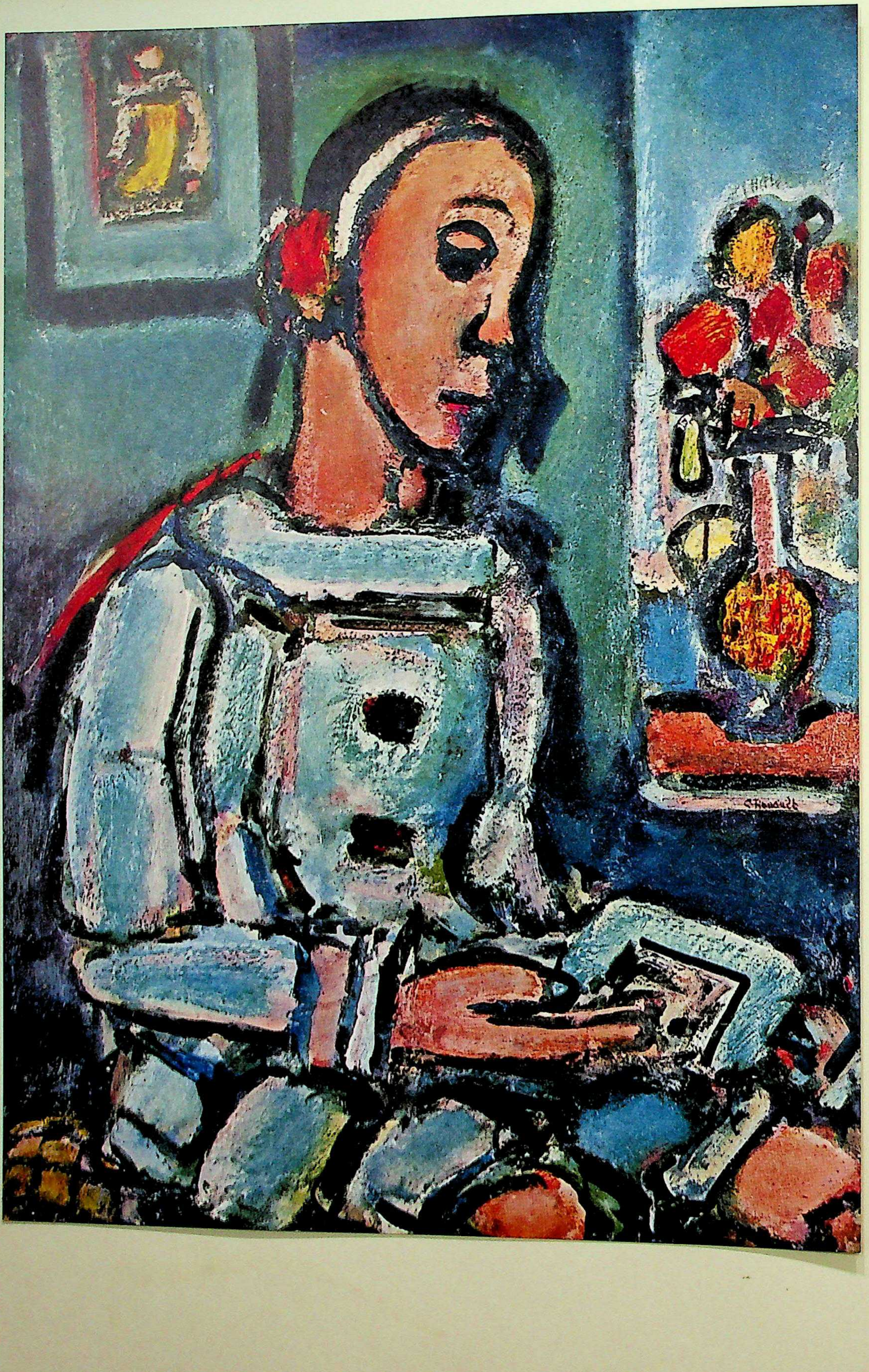
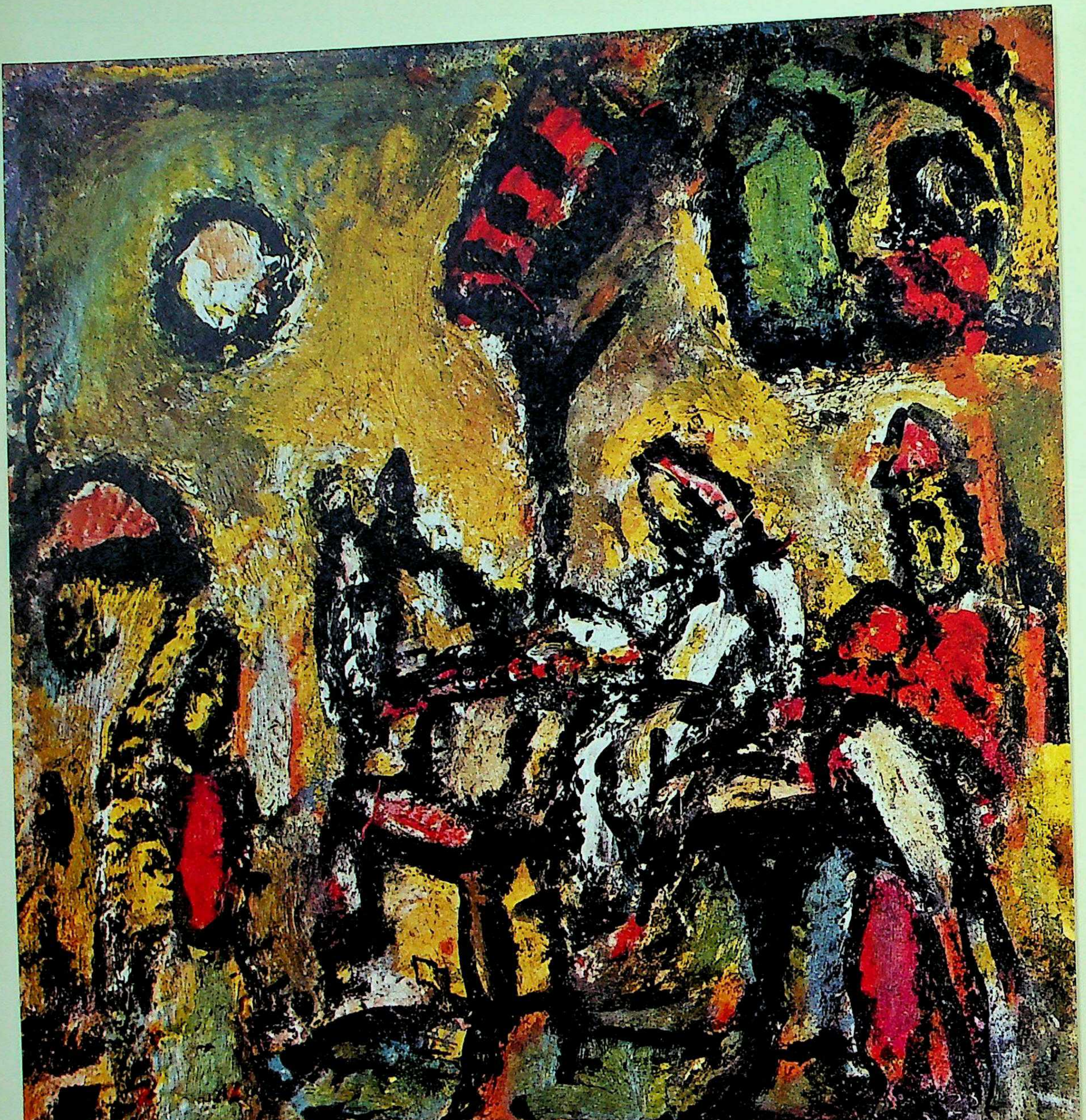

G Rouault

PLATE FIFTEEN
THE WISE PIERROT (1945)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Alex L. Hillman
Oil, 29½″ × 22″



ROUAULT

PLATE SIXTEEN
THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (1948)
Private Collection, Paris
Oil, 14½″ × 13″